



Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)

U.S. and Laos Co-Host Multinational Pandemic Influenza Workshop

VIENTIANE, Laos (April 8, 2010) - The U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Department's of Defense's (DoD) Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE) are partnering with the Lao National Emerging Infectious Disease Coordinating Office (NEIDCO) and the Lao Ministry of Health to co-host a multinational "Pandemic Influenza Civil-Military Senior Planners Workshop" 6-9 April, 2010.

"This [is] Laos' first regional multilateral event," said Andy Bates, lead for the pandemic influenza series, which is being executed on behalf of the U.S. military's Pacific Command (USPACOM). "We are extremely happy to partner with Laos and be part of this process."

The workshop opened with more than 45 civilian and military medical professionals from 12 nations. Participating nations include Cambodia, the Maldives, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

The goal of this four-day workshop is to provide senior civilian and military health planners with strategies to integrate civilian and military resources into contingency planning for major infectious disease outbreaks at the national, provincial, and district level.

"Last year [May 2009], only seven Asian countries were able to attend COE's senior-level Pandemic Influenza workshop involving the Asia-Pacific and African regions, and the UN in Rome [Italy] because it was at the beginning of the H1N1 outbreak in Asia," explained Andy Bates, COE lead for the pandemic influenza workshop series. "All the countries that were not able to attend that workshop have been invited to this one. Material from the Rome workshop, as well as additional lessons learned from last year's H1N1 outbreak are being covered."

"At this workshop, Laos will also be presenting on its newly instituted pandemic community surveillance network to other countries in the region," added Bates. "This is key as this network may provide an opportunity to contain an infectious disease outbreak before it spreads to the general population. [Last year], the reason why H1N1 spread so quickly outside of Mexico was because a local surveillance system was lacking."

The workshop is part of the ongoing cooperation by the U.S. Embassy in Laos and USPACOM with the Lao Ministry of Health, NEIDCO, and the People's Army Military Medical Department.

The opening ceremony for this workshop was attended by the office of the Lao Vice-Minister of Health; the Director of NEIDCO, Dr. Bounlay Phommasak; the Director of the Military Medical Department, Colonel Dr. Bounteuan Bandavong; and COE Director, Lieutenant General

(Retired) John Goodman. Ron Waldman, Director of USAID's Humanitarian Pandemic Preparedness (H2P) program and as well as participants from key UN agencies were also in attendance.

“Over the last few years, a number of Laotian officials have attended COE events,” said Bates. “Five months ago, we approached Laos with the idea of holding this event because of the development of their new pandemic surveillance system, which could be shared with regional neighbors.”

Following this workshop, COE will execute a series of bilateral workshops to take pandemic influenza lessons learned to the community level in several Asia-Pacific countries later this year.

The 2010 multi-event pandemic workshop series is the result of an inter-agency agreement between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

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The Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA) was established by the US Congress in 1994 to facilitate civil-military management in international disaster management and humanitarian assistance. It partners with a wide variety of national and international governmental, non-governmental and international organizations to provide relevant education, training, coordination and research.

COE-DMHA, a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) organization, is a direct reporting unit to the US military's Pacific Command (USPACOM) and is establishing field offices at global Combatant Commands (COCOMs) to promote global disaster preparedness and resiliency.

<http://www.coe-dmha.org>